



Columnist Robert De Andreis

Thorns in my tiara

by ROBERT DE ANDREIS

Last Saturday I became the proud recipient of two Cable Car awards for my work as an AIDS writer! I have never won a thing in my life and was totally thrilled to be so honored and recognized by our community. Unfortunately, I'm sick and tired of writing about AIDS.

One of the reasons I am a practicing recluse is precisely because of what happened at the awards night. Throughout the evening, beautiful people seized me, clutched me, hugged me, bent my ear, stroked my hands, whispered sweet nothings in my ear and told me they know me so well. They commented on the most intimate details of my life, and acted as if we were long-lost girlfriends. I am always gracious and polite, because deep down, I love every minute of it.

It's so twisted and surreal having anonymous readers know so much about my deepest, darkest, most private side. It's not that far off from all my years as a sex addict, when I would share such moments of ultimate intimacy with complete strangers.

I pity the voyeuristic reader, that creature who I dragged through all my HIV mud this year, blow after blow, in vivid, graphic detail. I know it's been tough on you, but it's been grueling for me. It's time you knew the truth: Writing this weekly column on my deteriorating health has been a major mind fuck for me and I'm not going to put myself through it anymore.

Readers who tell me

they think they know me well are deluded. No, honey, all you know about is my AIDS side, and there's a lot more to me than this lousy disease. This column has created, because of my writing skills, a caricature of a person — focusing on AIDS morning, noon and night and burlesquing my pain in the process. The truth is, I would never be thinking about AIDS this much if it weren't for this column. I am

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at peace with it. I grudgingly deal with it every day, but writing weekly essays about it keeps it much more heavily on my mind than it has a right to be. It's just a god-damn disease, for chrissake, it's not my entire life.

It cracks me up when people think I'm so negative or such a big death hag. It only appears that way because I write exclusively on AIDS. It's as if *The Sentinel* hired me to write a weekly column on menstruation. Then people would say,

"Oh, that Robert, he's always on the rag." This so-called real person you think you know so well is only a distorted fragment of a larger, more distorted person — a bigger mess than you think!

The weekly process of writing on my disease has not always been mentally healthful for me. I could have a perfectly fine week, but I'd have to sit down for a few hours and crank out some heavy AIDS story. Yuck! Enough is enough! I am not in any state of denial over my illness. I just get tired of using my writing, one of the few things left that still gives me any pleasure, to always focus on a rather unpleasant part of my life. Besides, I've told my AIDS story. There's a million different ones out there, all just as significant and just as banal.

The AIDS story itself is only minimally interesting. AIDS is a dull, painful, annoying, irksome, frustrating, terrifying and mundane disease. It's only because I'm a clever writer that I've made it appear so glamorous! I have covered most all aspects of it already. The past 79 weekly articles I've written on AIDS run the gamut. The only thing left is the eventual demise of the writer. Who wants to stick around for that? No, this grueling task I've imposed upon myself is serving the reader more than the writer — at the expense of my peace of mind. I want to enjoy writing again and spend the limited time I have left writing whatever the hell I want. I refuse to let AIDS kick the last bit of creative life out of me because I am not just a person with AIDS, I am a person with balls.

I accepted those two Cable Car awards with deep gratitude because I worked damn hard this year as a writer, harder than you know. We are so AIDS-numb in this town, I knew if I was going to tell my AIDS story and make a difference, without getting booed off the pages of *The Sentinel*, I'd have to reach deep down inside and pull out a voice no one, including myself, had heard before. I figured if it has to do with saving or comforting lives, any breach of personal privacy will be a price worth paying. But enough's enough! I pulled this so-called writing career out of thin air — I had never written a thing before these columns, and never written about anything other than AIDS. Haven't I paid my dues? Don't I get to write about fun stuff before I

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croak?

I spoke to *Sentinel* Publisher Ray Chalker about my dilemma and he agreed. I will continue a weekly column for the paper, but I don't want to be restricted to "HIV Commentary," my gay rag crown of thorns. I'm not abandoning AIDS. How could I? It's in my blood. Sure, I'll still cover AIDS and my tired old dying self, but I'd also like to write about a million other things while I still can, from growing up gay in this town to my years as an out-of-control sex addict and everything in between. Now you wouldn't mind those stories, would you?

SFS

For a bound set of my 79 HIV Commentary articles, send \$20 to: Robert De Andreis, 22 Clifford Terrace, #4, San Francisco, CA 94117.